

INSPIRE

Seven Strategies for Ending Violence Against Children

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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A recent study estimates that up to one billion children have experienced physical, sexual or psychological violence in the past year. INSPIRE is a technical package for everyone committed to preventing and responding to violence against children and adolescents – from government to grassroots, and from civil society to the private sector. It is a group of strategies distilled from the best available evidence and with the greatest potential to reduce violence against children.

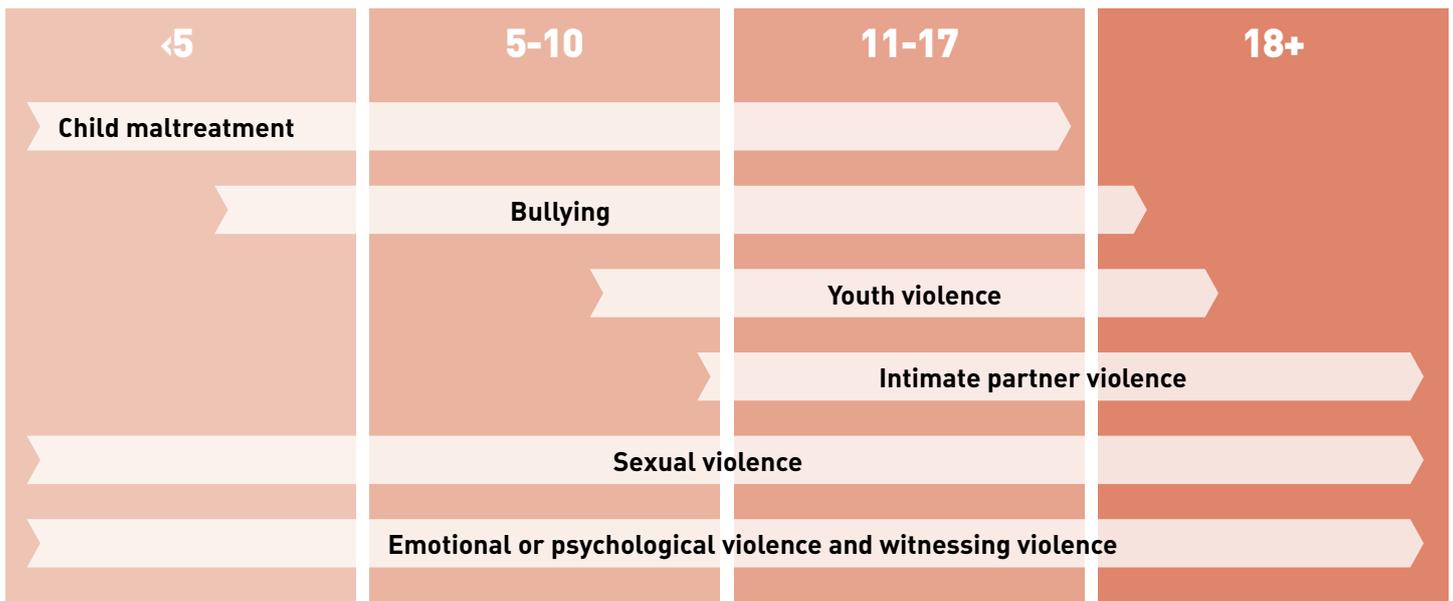
Ten agencies with a long history of galvanizing a consistent, evidence-based approach to preventing violence against children have collaborated to develop INSPIRE. These agencies stand together and urge countries and communities to intensify their efforts to prevent and respond to violence against children by implementing the strategies in this package.

Ending Violence Against Children is a Priority

Violence against children and adolescents includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and neglect. For infants and younger children, violence mainly takes the form of maltreatment at the hands of parents, caregivers and other authority figures. As children grow older, peer and intimate partner violence – bullying, fighting, sexual violence, and assault, often with weapons such as guns and knives – also become common.

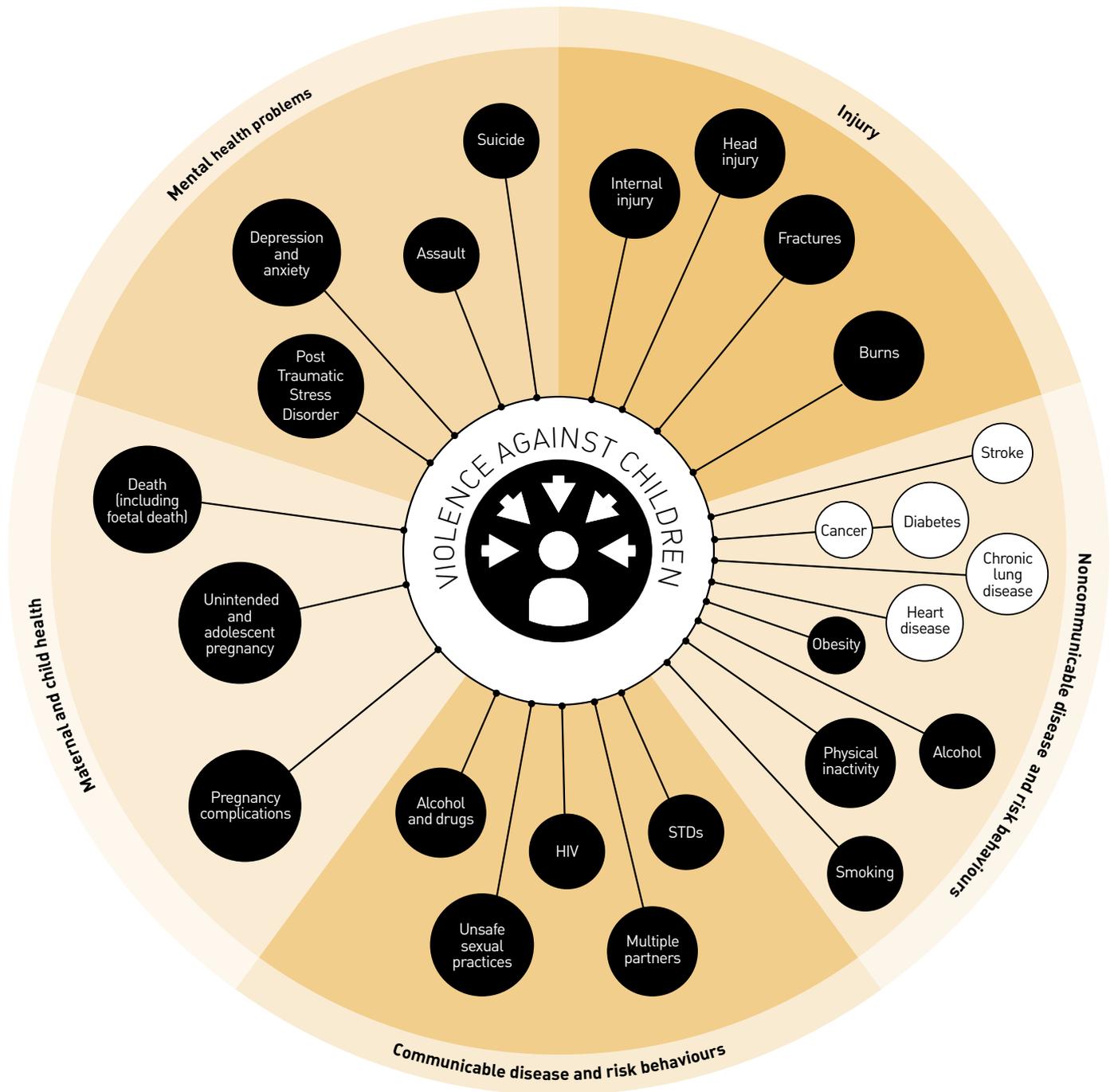
Over the course of their childhood, one in four children suffers physical abuse and almost one in five girls and one in 13 boys suffer sexual abuse. Homicide is among the top five causes of death in adolescents. Despite its high prevalence, this violence is often hidden, unseen or under-reported.

Violence against children takes different forms at different ages



Violence against children has significant, lasting effects that threaten children’s well-being and can persist into adulthood. Exposure to violence at an early age can impair brain development and lead to a host of immediate and lifelong physical and mental health consequences. The immediate and long-term public health impact and economic costs undermine investments in education, health and child well-being. Violence against children also erodes the productive capacity of future generations.

Potential health consequences of violence against children



Direct effect
 Indirect effect due to adoption of high-risk behaviour

Much of this violence and its enormous impact can be prevented through programmes that address its root causes and risk factors.

Violence arises from an interplay of individual, relationship, community, and societal factors, and these four levels represent key entry points for the INSPIRE strategies. Gender norms are a key society-level factor that make children and adolescents vulnerable to violence; they can reinforce the low status of girls and women in society and increase the likelihood that boys and men perpetrate violence.

INSPIRE: THE VISION

INSPIRE's vision is a world where all governments, with the strong participation of civil society and communities, routinely implement and monitor interventions to prevent and respond to violence against all children and adolescents, and help them reach their full potential.

It reinforces the protections guaranteed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which obliges States Parties to take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social, and educational measures to protect children from all forms of violence while in the care of parents, legal guardians, or any other person who has the care of the child. It reflects the urgent need to address the huge public health and social burden created by violence against children.

INSPIRE aims to help countries and communities achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Target 16.2, "end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children"; SDG Target 5.2, "eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation", and SDG Target 16.1, "significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere".

INSPIRE: COMPONENTS

The INSPIRE package includes seven strategies that together provide a framework for ending violence against children. In the full package, each strategy is presented with its objective, rationale, potential effects, specific approaches to implement the strategy, and evidence of effectiveness. Additionally, INSPIRE includes two cross-cutting activities that together help connect and strengthen – and assess progress towards – the seven strategies.

Overview of INSPIRE package for preventing and responding to violence against children aged 0–18 years

Strategy	Approach	Sectors	Cross-cutting activities
 Implementation and enforcement of laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laws banning violent punishment of children by parents, teachers or other caregivers • Laws criminalizing sexual abuse and exploitation of children • Laws that prevent alcohol misuse • Laws limiting youth access to firearms and other weapons 	Justice	
 Norms and values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing adherence to restrictive and harmful gender and social norms • Community mobilization programmes • Bystander interventions 	Health, Education, Social Welfare	Multisectoral actions and coordination
 Safe environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing violence by addressing “hotspots” • Interrupting the spread of violence • Improving the built environment 	Interior, Planning	
 Parent and caregiver support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivered through home visits • Delivered in groups in community settings • Delivered through comprehensive programmes 	Social Welfare, Health	
 Income and economic strengthening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cash transfers • Group saving and loans combined with gender equity training • Microfinance combined with gender norm training 	Finance, Labour	Monitoring and Evaluation
 Response and support services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counselling and therapeutic approaches • Screening combined with interventions • Treatment programmes for juvenile offenders in the criminal justice system • Foster care interventions involving social welfare services 	Health, Justice, Social Welfare	
 Education and life skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase enrolment in pre-school, primary and secondary schools • Establish a safe and enabling school environment • Improve children’s knowledge about sexual abuse and how to protect themselves against it • Life and social skills training • Adolescent intimate partner violence prevention programmes 	Education	

1. Implementation and enforcement of laws



The aim of this strategy is to **ensure the implementation and enforcement of laws to prevent violent behaviours, reduce excessive alcohol use, and limit youth access to firearms and other weapons**. Laws prohibiting violent behaviours like sexual abuse or violent punishment of children signal that society does not consider these behaviours acceptable. Such laws provide a way to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. Laws and policies can also reduce key risk factors for violence against children.

Expected outcomes:

- Reductions in physical violence towards children by parents, caregivers and authority figures
- Reductions in sexual abuse of children, including forced or pressured sex, unwanted attempted sex, and unwanted sexual touching
- Reductions in sexual exploitation of children including trafficking, pornography and prostitution
- Reductions in excessive alcohol consumption and binge drinking
- Reductions in firearm-related deaths and non-fatal injuries
- Increases in positive gender and social norms

2. Norms and values



Social and cultural norms can create a climate in which violence is encouraged or normalized. This strategy aims to **strengthen norms and values that support non-violent, respectful, nurturing, positive and gender equitable relationships for all children and adolescents**. Achieving this often requires modifying deeply ingrained social and cultural norms and behaviours – in particular, the idea that some forms of violence are not only normal, but sometimes justifiable. It involves approaches like community mobilization programmes, bystander interventions, and small group programmes that challenge harmful gender and social norms of boys.

Expected outcomes:

- Reduced acceptance of violence against women and children
- Reductions in early and forced marriage of young girls
- More favourable beliefs towards gender equity and gender-equitable division of labour
- More favourable attitudes to non-violent approaches to parental discipline
- Greater recognition of what constitutes abusive behaviour towards intimate partners and children
- Increased bystander intervention to prevent violence against intimate partners and children
- Reductions in physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or parent

3. Safe environments



This strategy aims to **create and sustain safe streets and other environments where children and youth gather and spend time**. It focuses on modifying communities' social and physical environment (rather than the individuals within it) to foster positive – and deter harmful – behaviours. It involves approaches like problem-oriented policing directed towards “hotspots” for violence, interrupting violent conflicts by stopping retaliatory violence, and changing the built environment.

Expected outcomes:

- Reductions in assault-related injuries
- Increased safety when moving around the community

4. Parent and caregiver support



This strategy aims to **reduce harsh parenting practices and create positive parent-child relationships** by helping parents and caregivers understand the importance of positive, non-violent discipline and of close, effective communication. Parent and caregiver support can be provided through parent training programmes delivered through home visiting or in groups. In these approaches, parents are educated about their children's development and trained to adopt positive parenting practices such as non-violent discipline, and effective parent-child communication on sensitive topics.

Expected outcomes:

- Reductions in proven child maltreatment cases and in referrals to child protection services
- Reductions in abusive, negative or harsh parenting, especially in relation to discipline
- Reductions in bullying and being bullied
- Reductions in physical, emotional or sexual violence victimization by partners or peers
- Reductions in aggression and delinquency during adolescence
- Increases in positive parent-child interactions
- Increases in parental monitoring of child and youth safety

5. Income and economic strengthening



This strategy aims to **improve families' economic security and stability, thereby reducing intimate partner violence and child maltreatment**. It involves approaches like making cash transfers to families in combination with parent training and/or on condition that they ensure their children attend school; or providing microfinance in combination with education for men and women on gender norms, domestic violence and sexuality.

Expected outcomes:

- Reductions in physical violence towards children by parents or other caregivers
- Reductions in intimate partner violence
- Reductions in early and forced marriage of young girls
- Reductions in children witnessing intimate partner violence in the home
- Increases in social norms and attitudes that disapprove of intimate partner violence

6. Response and support services



This strategy aims to **improve access to good-quality health, social welfare and criminal justice support services for all children who need them – including for reporting violence – to reduce the long-term impact of violence**.

Children who have experienced violence need access to a variety of health and support services to help them heal. These services can also help break the cycle of violence in children's lives and help them better cope and recover. Basic health services, such as emergency medical care for violence-related injuries, and clinical care for victims of sexual violence (including post-exposure prophylaxis against HIV in cases of rape when indicated), are the main priority. Where these basic services are in place and are child-focused, companion services can help children seek other essential aspects of support and care, report violent incidents, and receive additional referrals. These can include counselling and therapeutic approaches, screening combined with interventions, treatment programmes for juvenile offenders in the criminal justice system, and foster care interventions involving social welfare services.

Expected outcomes:

- Reductions in recurrence of the same type of violence in the short term
- Reductions in trauma symptoms (e.g., post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety)
- Reductions in sexually transmitted infections and negative reproductive health outcomes
- Reductions in victimization or perpetration of violence in the short term and later in life

7. Education and life skills



This strategy aims to **increase children’s access to more effective, gender-equitable education, social-emotional learning and life-skills training, and ensure that school environments are safe and enabling**. Gains in education for both girls and boys protect against both victimization and perpetration of violence. This strategy involves approaches such as increasing enrolment in pre-school, primary and secondary schools, establishing a safe and enabling school environment, improving children’s knowledge about sexual abuse and how to protect themselves against it, adolescent intimate partner violence prevention programmes, and life and social skills training programmes. Programmes that strengthen children’s social and emotional learning enhance their communication and relationship skills and help them learn to solve problems, deal with emotions, empathize and safely manage conflict – life skills that can prevent violence.

Expected outcomes:

- Increases in school attendance and academic success
- Reductions in aggressive and violent behaviours
- Reductions in bullying behaviours
- Reductions in physical and sexual intimate partner violence victimization and perpetration
- Increases in awareness of, and improved attitudes about, intimate partner violence
- Reductions in drug use and excessive alcohol use

Cross-cutting activity 1: Multisectoral actions and coordination

Successful delivery of INSPIRE’s evidence-based prevention programmes and services depends on collaboration between multiple sectors and stakeholders – public, private, and civil society – at national and local levels. These may include departments responsible for education, health, justice, finance and social welfare; and civil society organizations, such as professional associations, faith-based organizations, academic institutions, foundations, and other NGOs.

Cross-cutting activity 2: Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring systems can be used to provide data on the magnitude and circumstances of violence against children, track the implementation of planned activities, assess their impact, and address gaps. For these purposes, data on violence against children from national population-based surveys and facility-based administrative systems (such as hospitals, police records, and social services) are essential. Evaluations provide policy-makers and public health officials with critical information on whether programmes and policies designed to prevent or respond to violence against children are having their intended impact.



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CONCLUSION

These strategies for ending violence against children cross the health, social welfare, education, finance, and justice sectors. Each is underpinned by strong or promising evidence of success in high-income countries, with growing evidence that they also work in low- and middle-income countries. The strategies are intended to reinforce each other and work best in combination. Monitoring and evaluation will play a key role in implementing and improving this technical package as lessons are learned. Implementation guides are being developed for each strategy to guide countries in adapting and implementing the strategies according to their own context and structures.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development contains a bold, ambitious and clear call to eliminate violence against children. This provides a unique opportunity to catalyse action that builds safe, stable and nurturing relationships and environments for every child. We all have the power and responsibility to act. The seven strategies and cross-cutting activities that constitute INSPIRE are the best way to accelerate progress in ending violence against children. Let's put them to work.

The true nature of a nation's standing is how well it attends to its children. When children are hurt, we, as a society, are diminished. When we work together to end violence in their lives, we rise to the best in ourselves, we help children reach their full potential, and we promote a future of peace and dignity for the next generation.



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